

The Nigeria Example

Career Progression Analysis and Military Biographics (C NF)

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Analysis of world politics in the late 1990s reflects the struggle to find usable concepts with which to understand events now that the Cold War era is over. The question of how to explain what is happening is being answered in academia, in think tanks, and in the press by references to the growth of technology, the emergence of a more interconnected global economy, and even the waning of the nation state itself. (U)

Despite these new analytic trends, the ability to understand world politics, even in these uncharted times, can benefit substantially from a reinvigorated effort to use an old tool: biographics. At a time when ideology no longer influences the actions of world leaders to the extent that it once did, it is more important than ever to know who leaders are as people. Whether the issue is Boris Yeltsin's health or Jiang Zemin's ability to control the Chinese Army, biographical intelligence and analysis play an important role in international affairs. (U)

In this regard, Africa biographical analysis is perhaps even more important because institutional development in most countries there is so weak that decisions and events are much more a product of individual personalities than in other parts of the world where government bureaucracies play a determining role. Moreover, biographical analysis is especially important in Africa because the political cast of characters in most African countries tends to be small and enduring, suggesting

that, once biographical analysis is done, it can have a long shelf life. (U)

African personalities in the news have been around a long time. Laurent Kabila, the successful Zairean insurgent commander, went into opposition in eastern Zaire in 1968. Similarly, Charles Taylor, the Liberian warlord and presidential aspirant, was in opposition during the Tolbert regime and was a government procurement agent during Head of State Doe's tenure. In Nigeria, General Abacha has been a key figure in practically every Nigerian coup in recent memory. (U)

Need for a New Look

In the past, biographical sketches have often focused mainly on the top civilian and military leadership, especially those figures with whom US policymakers would personally interact. A key objective centered on highlighting personal strengths and weaknesses so that policymakers might recognize possible ways to influence their counterparts. This kind of analysis is still important. When biographical research focuses on the dynamics of groups, however, it can be even more useful to policymakers because it then has the potential to provide an understanding of the underpinnings of an individual's leadership. This helps a policymaker form realistic expectations as to what kind of policy initiatives are likely to succeed. (U)

Furthermore, even though the number of military governments seems to

be declining, military officers, active duty and retired, serving in governments merit closer scrutiny. They do not always fit current stereotypes depicting them as thugs bent solely on their own enrichment. Military personalities are no less complicated than their civilian counterparts, and they may have more diverse and cosmopolitan backgrounds. Many are also better educated and experienced in leadership than the civilians are. (U)

The Chronology of Careers

Career progression analysis is useful and valuable to the analyst's efforts to obtain an accurate reading of military personalities. It involves looking at an individual's professional assignments and activities over a period of time to see whether these details exhibit a trend or a pattern. Because it consists mainly of the chronological ordering of career events (similar in many respects to an employment résumé), it seems simple and uninteresting. It is, however, a practical technique for organizing what can prove to be large amounts of detail in a way that reveals a career's dynamic, if there is one to be discerned, and it also can provide insights that may not otherwise be apparent. (U)

Unlike many social science models and explanatory frameworks, career progression analysis requires immersion in the details of an individual's personal history, and this involves a certain amount of subjective judgment as to how to order or group the data. For example, what criteria are to be used to establish career periods? Begin with a person's age? The kinds of assignments he pursues? His rank progression? His linkages to mentors,

patrons, and cliques? Or the administration of different head of state under whom he served? Each case will be unique, even though similarities among individuals will emerge, regardless of the criterion used. (U)

While career progression analysis helps immeasurably to illuminate the background of a single individual, it can be especially useful when applied to a group. Shared experiences which serve to bind individuals together and create group cohesion then become more visible. (U)

The Case of Nigeria

In the context of the Nigerian officer corps, such factors as an officer's experience in Nigeria's civil war (1967-70), his education and training (both in Nigeria and overseas), and experience in peacekeeping operations, such as the Economic Community of West Africa Cease-fire Monitoring Group in Liberia, are particularly important. Ethnicity, religion, and regional loyalties have long been used to assess the dynamics of the Nigerian officer corps.

The possibility of applying career progression analysis to an entire officer corps is greatest for countries where biographical data has accumulated for a period of many years and where it exists for a broad range of personnel. This is the case for Nigeria. (U)

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The biographical files vary in quality and depth of material, but they typically are adequate to meet the need for background information on specific officers in which a policymaker may have an interest. At times, they are also rich enough to allow the discernment of career patterns. (U)

The Rise and Fall of Colonel Gwadabe

The career of Nigerian Col. Lawan Gwadabe, a Hausa and a Muslim, who is serving a prison sentence for his role in the March 1995 coup plot against the Abacha regime, provides a good case study for career progression analysis. The three broad periods of Colonel Gwadabe's career (Figure 1) are demarcated mainly by Gen. Ibrahim Babangida's tenure as Head of State (1985-93). Gwadabe's career flourished between 1985 and 1993, not the least because he supported the 1985 coup that brought Babangida to power. Thus, a logical principle to use in organizing the events of Gwadabe's career is that of Babangida's own tenure—before, during, and after. (U)

With the data arrayed in this manner and armed with some foreknowledge of Nigerian history, Gwadabe's career can be seen to exhibit several notable characteristics. First, he is not a veteran of the Nigerian civil war. Nigerian Army colonels of Gwadabe's age group represent the next generation of Nigerian Army general officers, and many lack firsthand military experience in the war. As a result, they are excluded from the fraternity of war heroes, still a

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major factor in the degree of respect which senior officers receive and in the degree of influence they can wield over the officer corps. The value of national cohesion, strongly held by senior officers in the current regime, will be correspondingly weaker in this and succeeding generations. (U)

Gwadabe's education and military training reveal a typical mix of domestic and foreign experiences, with a prominent US aspect that is not limited to military institutions. His training background also shows the predominance of armor, the sector of the Army Babangida favored. (U)

Third, and most important, the career period framework shows clearly that Gwadabe's career flourished under Babangida and that his assignments progressed toward increasingly responsible political, rather than military, jobs. In retrospect, his role in the Angola, Sudan, and Mozambique peace processes appear to be the pinnacle of his career. Correspondingly, his career declines under Babangida's successor, General Abacha. His assignments begin to fall more and more in the military sphere, until he is ultimately convicted for his participation in the March 1995 coup plot. (U)

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training and education, unlike that of Gwadabe, centered on the infantry, Abacha's favored branch of the Army. During this period, Bamaiyi saw combat in the civil war. (U)

As a field-grade officer, Bamaiyi begins to command units at the brigade level, undertakes his first training in the United States, and, with his appointment as commander of the Brigade of Guards, he begins migrating toward the command of units associated with the regime's security. As a general officer, his training is largely complete, and he continues to lead units important to regime security with his assignment as commander of the Lagos Garrison Command. (U)

Unlike Gwadabe, whose military career centered predominantly on political jobs, Bamaiyi emerges as more of a military professional. As such, his case is especially interesting in that it contradicts the conventional wisdom which holds that Nigerian military heads of state purge loyalists of previous regimes when they come to power. To some extent this is true, but Bamaiyi's career progression demonstrates that "professional" as opposed to "political" officers not only survive, but also can flourish—an indicator of the size and complexity of the officer corps. Under Babangida (1985-93), Bamaiyi commanded such key units as the 4 Mechanized Brigade at Ilorin, the 9 Mechanized Brigade at Ikeja, and the Brigade of Guards at Abuja. Thus, under Abacha, Bamaiyi went even further. He commanded the Lagos Garrison Command, and he became Army chief of staff. (U)

A Soldier's Soldier

Current Chief of Army Staff Maj. Gen. Ishaya Bamaiyi provides another illustration of the application of career progression analysis. An ethnic Zuru and Christian from northern Kebbi state, Bamaiyi reflects the reputation of the Zurus for professionalism which has earned them a special niche in the Nigerian Army. (U)

Using rank progression as the organizing principle, Bamaiyi's three main career periods (Figure 2) are that of company-grade officer, field-grade officer, and general officer. As a second lieutenant through captain, Bamaiyi was occupied primarily with small-unit commands at the level of platoon and battalion. His military

Maj. Gen. Ishaya Rizi Bamaiyi***Career Period I: Company-Grade Officer***

1968 *Attended the Nigerian Defense School (probably the Nigerian Defense Academy in Kaduna); commissioned as a second lieutenant.*

Platoon commander, 68 Infantry Battalion, Onitsha, during civil war.

1969 *Adjutant, 9 Infantry Brigade, Training Wing; promoted to lieutenant.*

1970-71 *Second in command, 184 Infantry Battalion; attended Military Training College, Kaduna (probably the Nigerian Defense Academy).*

1971-75 *Commander, 181st Infantry Battalion and 183rd Infantry Battalion.*

1973 *Promoted to captain.*

1975 *Deputy Assistant Adjutant, 26 Infantry Brigade, Ilorin.*

1976-77 *Commander, 70 Infantry Battalion.*

1977-78 *Deputy Assistant Adjutant and Quartermaster General, Nigerian Defense Academy, Kaduna.*

Career Period II: Field-Grade Officer

1978 *Promoted to major.*

1979-80 *Attended Nigerian Command and General Staff College, Jaji.*

1980-81 *Commander, 72 Infantry Battalion, Makurdi.*

1981-82 *Attended US Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.*

1982 *Served on staff of Nigerian Command and General Staff College, Jaji.*

1983 *Promoted to lieutenant colonel.*

1985 *Deputy Commandant, Nigerian Army Depot, Zaria.*

1986 *Commander, 4 Mechanized Brigade, Ilorin; promoted to colonel.*

1986-90 *Commander, 9 Mechanized Brigade, Ikeja, Lagos.*

Career Period III: General Officer

1990 *Promoted to brigadier general.*

1990 *Commander, Brigade of Guards, Abuja.*

1993 *ECOMOG Chief of Staff*

1993 *Director of Operations, Army Headquarters.*

1993 *Appointed Commander, Lagos Garrison Command.*

1994 *Promoted to major general.*

1996 *Appointed Chief of Army Staff.*

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Answering Questions

The compilation of career progression profiles establishes a perspective of an officer's development and capabilities, and these data assist policymakers in forming preliminary judgments about the officer. At a glance, a policymaker can see whether the person has been exposed to US values, whether there are areas of common experience that can be used as conversational points of entry if a meeting is in the offing, and whether the person is close to decisionmakers in his own government or on the periphery of power. (U)

Career progression analysis also helps a policymaker come to grips with much larger and more important questions such as that of whether a transition to civilian rule in Nigeria can work in a country which has experienced military administration for most of its post-independence history and in which the military is the only cohesive and enduring national institution. It does so by pointing up those questions which address underlying organizational dynamics. In this case, is political careerism so entrenched in the military that it cannot turnover power to civilians without risking permanent eclipse? Or, are there enough apolitical professionals left in the military to oversee a power shift and keep ambitious younger officers in check long enough for civilians to consolidate their hold on power? (U)

In addition, both policymakers and analysts can gain insight into coups and coup attempts through the use of career progression analysis. The April 1990 coup attempt in Nigeria may have been instigated by professional officers who saw their careers set back by rewards to political sycophants, while the plot of March 1995 may have been the work of "political" officers such as Gwadabe who felt marginalized by the Abacha regime. (U)

Finally, while parochial influences of ethnicity, religion, and regionalism will always be a factor in the Nigerian military, career progression analysis shows that the military is a much more complex and sophisticated organization than these traditional factors lead one to believe. It provides insight into the country's defense priorities and its foreign policy. In Nigeria, and perhaps in Third World countries in general, policymakers can expect that future politicians and government officials will be drawn in part from the ranks of the military which has afforded its officers on-the-job training as provincial governors, diplomats, and bureaucrats. (U)

Broader Applications

Career progression analysis is a particularly useful tool for analyzing the military leadership of countries in which the military has been, is, or may become an important influence. Indonesia is a good example of a country whose political dynamics could be illuminated by such analysis. The Indonesian military's political role is longstanding, its role is legally codified by the concept of "dual function," and it still holds leadership positions at all levels of government, including seats in parliament. (U)

The career progression technique can also be useful in analyzing leadership in countries that are moving to consolidate civilian rule. China, with which Nigeria is expanding relations, is perhaps a case in point. Although the military in China has largely "returned to the barracks" and the institutionalization of civilian rule is more developed than it is in Nigeria, some senior officers remain influential. If the military returned to power in the event of a security crisis or if civilian government collapsed, career progression analysis could assist analysts in judging how well military government would perform by showing the degree of international, political, and bureaucratic experience of the officers who have come to power. (U)